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RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 5961
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ 5026
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RUEHRG/AMCONSUL RECIFE 5946
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RUEHRI/AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO 3464
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 14 BRASILIA 002523

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT PASS USAID TO LAC/RSD, LAC/SAM, G/ENV, PPC/ENV
TREASURY FOR USED IBRD AND IDB AND INTL/MDB
USDA FOR FOREST SERVICE: LIZ MAHEW
INTERIOR FOR DIR INT AFFAIRS: K WASHBURN
INTERIOR FOR FWS: TOM RILEY
INTERIOR PASS USGS FOR INTERNATIONAL: J WEAVER
JUSTICE FOR ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES: JWEBB
EPA FOR INTERNATIONAL: CAM HILL-MACON
USDA FOR ARS/INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH: G FLANLEY
NSF FOR INTERNATIONAL: HAROLD STOLBERG

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [TBIO](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [XR](#) [BR](#)
SUBJECT: SOUTH AMERICA ESTH NEWS, NUMBER 85

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11. The following is the eighty-fifth in a series of newsletters, published by the Brasilia Regional Environmental Hub, covering environment, science and technology, and health news in South America. The information below was gathered from news sources from across the region, and the views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Hub office or our constituent posts. Addressees who would like to receive a user-friendly email version of this newsletter should contact Larissa Stoner at stonerla@state.gov. The e-mail version also contains a calendar of upcoming ESTH events in the region.

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Agriculture

13. Brazil's Lula Gives Agribusiness the Green Light, Environmentalists Protest

NOV. 25, 2006 - During a visit to the State of Mato Grosso, Luis Inacio Lula da Silva stated that the country is ready to take the leap of economic growth. Lula also guaranteed that during his second term as President, agriculture will not be faced with the same crisis as it faced these past two years. Standing beside Mato Grosso's reelected governor, Blairo Maggi known as the King of Soy (or the King of Deforestation, depending from which perspective), he affirmed that the federal and state governments will work together to solve these issues. "I am aware of what agriculture in Brazil represents to the growth and wealth of this country. [...] we are going to invest in roads and in energy." According to media speculation, Lula has given Governor Blairo Maggi the right to choose the new Minister of Agriculture. One of the 'favorite' names is current Minister of Cities, Marcio Fortes de Almeida, who was the Executive Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture during the

presidency of Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Fifty-one environmental defense organizations drafted a letter on Nov. 24 protesting against

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Lula's words during his Mato Grosso visit during which he claimed that "indigenous, traditional communities and environmental matters as well as the Ministry of Justice" will not be an obstacle for investments in the country, especially in the area of energy.

Sources - FSP, Documento, and Valor Economico

14. Argentina: Residents Say "Stop the Spraying!"

NOV. 11, 2006 - Cultivation of genetically modified soybeans is expanding in Argentina, and with it, the use of herbicides. The "Paren de fumigar" (Stop the Fumigation) campaign warns against agro-chemical spraying in urban areas, as activists collect information about its impacts in order to denounce it. Behind the initiative are the Rural Reflection Group (GRR), the Nature Protection Center and neighborhood organizations. In the last 15 years, genetically modified (GM) soybean farming has extended its zone of influence, and today is Argentina's leading crop, as well as the country's principal export. The latest harvest of 15.5 million hectares consumed 160 million liters of glyphosate -- six times more than a decade ago. The serious problem, according to the groups' complaint, is that this chemical, which kills all plants except for the transgenic crop itself, is sprayed within meters of people's homes. Historically, forests, dairy farms and pastures surrounded the towns, and mitigated the impact of chemical spraying of fields. But now those protective barriers have disappeared.

Source - Tierramerica

15. Argentine Biodiesel Might Fuel Monoculture, Too

NOV. 2006 - Biodiesel is drawing particularly strong interest on account of Argentina's position as one of the world's foremost growers of oilseeds, which could be used to make the fuel. The third leading soybean producer behind the United States and Brazil, Argentina ranks first among the world's soy-oil exporters, sending 5.5 million tons abroad annually. But as interest in biofuels has grown, so, too, have concerns that corresponding pressure to intensify soy cultivation--the vast majority of which employs transgenic varieties--will worsen already serious problems of soil depletion, deforestation and erosion. Though current Argentine biofuels production is minimal, there are signs of change. In May, for instance, the national Congress passed legislation requiring

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that by 2010, biofuels must account for 5 percent of the country's fuel use. The law also creates fiscal incentives including a fuel-tax exemption for biofuels and value-added tax rebates for biofuels producers. Currently, 26 biofuels projects--the vast majority focusing on biodiesel--are planned in Argentina, according to the Argentine Biofuels and Hydrogen Association (AABH). Their various investors range from the Spanish oil company Repsol YPF to financier and philanthropist George Soros.

Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

Water Issues

16. Indian Activists Shut Down Peruvian-Amazon Oil Sites

NOV. 2006 - Accusing the government of ignoring their health and environmental concerns, Achuar indigenous communities in the Corrientes River Valley last month blocked access routes and took over oil wells in the Peruvian Amazon, forcing the PlusPetrol Norte oil company to halt operations. The 13-day protest cost the company about USD 15 million in lost production, according to Peru's Ministry of Energy and Mines. Achuar affiliated with the Federation

of Native Communities of the Corrientes River (Feconaco) lifted the blockade in Blocks 1AB and 8 on Oct. 22, after signing an agreement with the company and the national and regional governments on environmental and health issues. Among the Achuar's key objectives was to get PlusPetrol to stop contaminating local waterways with production water, the saline, heavy-metals-tainted water that is brought to the surface during oil extraction. Of the 1.3 million barrels of production water PlusPetrol generates daily, some 230,000 are pumped back underground, or reinjected, with the rest disposed of on the surface.

Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

Wildlife

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17. Colombia: Protecting Bats Can Be Profitable

NOV. 20, 2006 - Researchers at the National University of Colombia are working to raise awareness in local communities about the importance of preserving the caves where bats (*Miniopterus schreibersii*) seek refuge, and that bat guano is useful as organic fertilizer. Manuela Herrera, at the public University of the Atlantic, told Tierramerica that if the farmers take care of the caves and don't scare the bats or interfere with the flying mammal's life cycle, they will obtain significant quantities of guano, which they may also sell on the market. The bats are important in pest control, says Herrera, because they catch as many as 600 mosquitoes per hour, and a bat colony can consume up to 125 tons per night.

Source - Tierramerica

18. Endorsement by Chile and Suriname to the Migratory Species GEF Proposal

NOV. 20, 2006 - "The Western Hemisphere Migratory Species Initiative (WHMSI) Interim Steering Committee is pleased to announce that Chile and Suriname have submitted letters of endorsement for the WHMSI Project, assigning USD 156,250 each from their GEF RAF funds. We congratulate Chile's Environmental Commission-CONAMA (GEF Focal Point) and Agricultural Service-SAG (WHMSI Focal Point), as well as Suriname's Ministry of Labor, Technological Development and Environment-MILIEU (GEF Focal Point) and Forest Service (WHMSI Focal Point) for their leadership and support to WHMSI."

Source - a message from the WHMSI bulletin

19. Strengthening Regional Management for the Sustainable Use of Amazonian Biodiversity

NOV. 21, 2006 - The Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) carried out the "First Meeting of National Coordinators for the Project 'Strengthening of Regional Management for the Sustainable Use of Amazonian Biodiversity'" in Brasilia (Brazil) October 25-27, 2006.

A total of USD 2.4 million will be allocated for the project, of which USD 1.9 will come from IDB, USD 0.3 million from ACTO, and USD 0.2 million from each Amazon Basin country. The execution period for the project is 3.5 years. The project is made up of three

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components and in general consists of the hiring of technical experts to formulate action plans in the region: A) Formulating a strategic framework and regional action plan on biodiversity (USD 122,000); B) Strengthening the capacity of coordinating applied research and generating public information accessible regionally (USD 820,000); and C) Strengthening the capacity for coordinating and supporting conservation in priority areas (USD 928,000).

Source - BRASILIA 00002448

[110. Venezuela: Flamingos Enjoy Good Health](#)

NOV. 11, 2006 - So far in 2006, in the northwestern Venezuelan marsh of Los Olivitos alone, 6,700 Caribbean flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber ruber*) have hatched, reports Betsabey Motta, from the Environment Ministry's office of biodiversity. The flamingo population in northern Venezuela has grown continuously over the past 10 years, said Motta. Flamingos "are an overprotected species in Venezuela, as they require a simple habitat, even with scant vegetation, but salt mining continues to threaten all of the flora in marshes like Los Olivitos, to the detriment of other bird species," Jorge Hinestroza, professor of ecology at the University of Zulia, told Tierramerica. The rainy season -- longer and more intense this year -- helped in the production of more plants as food, sought by migratory birds like the flamingo in the southern extension of the Caribbean Basin.

Source - Tierramerica

Fishing & Marine Conservation

[111. Chile to Protect Oceans through Ecotourism](#)

NOV. 22, 2006 - Chile's National Environmental Commission (Conama) has launched a new initiative to protect marine resources while at the same time cashing in on the tourism boom Chile is currently enjoying. The National Network for Protected and Multiple-Use Marine Areas and Coast (AMCP-MU) will work with local communities to promote economic growth through sustainable industries as well as conservation and scientific exploration. Sports such as diving, whale watching and sports fishing will be developed. The initiative

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comes at a time when, according to Chile's state-owned newspaper, La Nacion, "the loss in marine ecosystems is not only growing, but growing at an alarming rate." The government project first began in 2003 and aims to "ensure the conservation and restoration of ecosystems by reducing the rate of loss in biodiversity by 2010." Three regions have been designated as protected marine areas under the scheme: Isla Grande in Atacama (Region Three), Lafken Mapu Lahual (Region Ten) and Francisco Coloane near the Magellan Straits (Region Twelve).

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

[112. Brazil: Growing Freshwater Pearls](#)

Nov 20, 2006 - In a pioneering initiative in Brazil, the University of Sao Paulo is studying the viability of in vitro cultivation of two threatened bivalve mollusk species in order to use some of them for producing freshwater pearls. Larvae of the *Anodontites trapesialis* and *Diplodon rotundus gratus* will be introduced in rivers in Sao Paulo state. The two species are endangered because of water pollution, the construction of dams and the presence of invasive species. "The production of pearls would begin in four or five years, when we complete the research and repopulation phase, and we are assured that the project doesn't hurt the environment," biologist Ricardo Cunha Lima, author of the research, told Tierramerica. Freshwater pearls cost less, and are less shiny and darker colored than saltwater pearls.

Source - Tierramerica

Protected Areas

[113. Goldman Sachs Wins Award for Chile Nature Reserve](#)

NOV. 9, 2006 - The U.S. Secretary of State's 2006 Award for Corporate Excellence (ACE) went to Goldman Sachs for their donation of 680,000 acres of wilderness in Chile's southern Tierra del Fuego to the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). Situated on Chile's

southernmost Tierra del Fuego Island, the area contains native beech tree forests, peat bogs, alpine meadows, river systems and snow-capped mountains. It is home to several rare species of

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wildlife including the Magellenic woodpecker, the Firecrown hummingbird and the Culpeo fox. The investment bank obtained the property in 2003 in a routine business transaction and worked with Chilean government officials and the WCS to set up a nature reserve instead of liquidating the property. Goldman Sachs also set up a USD 7 million endowment to fund the future park. The ACE award is given out each year by the U.S. Secretary of State in recognition of the role that U.S. businesses play in advancing good corporate citizenship, innovation and democratic principles abroad.

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

14. Brazil Forbids GM Crops in Indigenous and Protected Areas

NOV. 09, 2006 - Brazilian president Luis Inacio Lula da Silva signed a temporary measure on October 31, which prohibits experimental and commercial genetically modified (GM) crops in Indigenous areas and in protected areas in Brazil. However, a decree signed by Lula on the same day reduces the minimum distance separating GM crops from protected areas - the so called 'buffer zones.' According to the new law, the minimum distance between GM crops and a protected area will be determined on a case-by-case basis for each GM variety.

Source - SciDev

Pollution

15. Chile: Air Pollution Online

NOV. 11, 2006 - The levels of air pollution recorded each hour by the seven monitoring stations in the Chilean capital are published in real time on the web page of the Metropolitan Region's health authority (<http://www.asrm.cl>), which previously only reported the daily average. The regional health ministry decided to make the data available after three citizen organizations sued the agency for access to public information. The ministry had refused over the course of three months to respond to several requests. In Santiago, a city hemmed in by mountains, the worst air pollution is recorded between April and September. In 2005 there were seven environmental alerts and two pre-emergencies declared by the authorities.

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Source - Tierramerica

16. Brazil: Mega-Cities Far From Meeting Air Quality Standards

NOV. 11, 2006 - Brazil's major cities will have to reduce their air pollution much more if they hope to comply with the new parameters for air quality established by the World Health Organization (WHO). The WHO reduced the acceptable maximum level of the annual average for suspended particulates from 70 to 20 micrograms per cubic meter, cut the daily maximum limit of ozone from 120 to 100 micrograms, and the daily average of sulfur dioxide from 120 to 25 micrograms. Sao Paulo, for example, has an average of 45 micrograms of suspended particulates per cubic meter -- more than twice the WHO recommended limit. Every year, air pollution is responsible for the deaths of some 50,000 people in Brazil.

Source - Tierramerica

Climate Change

17. This Year's Ozone Hole is a Record Breaker

NOV. 2006 - The so-called ozone hole over Antarctica and the southern regions of Chilean and Argentine Patagonia set new records this year for both area and depth, according to NASA. Meanwhile, scientists say that based on improvements in modeling, they now forecast the area of extreme ozone thinning won't begin to heal until 2024--well over a decade later than previously thought. Scientists say the hole's increased size this year was due not to concentrations of ozone-depleting chemicals, which thanks to international efforts have been on the decline since the mid-1990s, but to fluctuating weather patterns. Chile and Argentina have made similar efforts to protect people in Patagonia from the increased ultraviolet radiation that occurs when the ozone hole appears. Both nations issue color-coded ozone alerts for locals. Distributed through the local media, the alerts assign colors according to the intensity of the ultraviolet radiation. In 2003, Argentina and Chile agreed to conduct joint research on the effects of ozone depletion in the Patagonian and Antarctic regions. They also pledged close collaboration on climate-change research and the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol. But scientists on both sides of

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the Andes complain the two governments have failed to follow through. In early 2004, a binational meeting was held, followed by the formation of a binational commission charged with developing ozone-hole impact studies. The research, however, has not been carried out on account of a lack of domestic and international funding.

Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

18. UN Plan Aims to Share Carbon Projects More Fairly

NOV. 16, 2006 - The UN has launched a new initiative to help developing nations participate in carbon finance funds, such as the Clean Development Mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol. The Nairobi Framework was announced November 15 at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change held in Nairobi, Kenya, following urgent requests from leaders of developing nations for help to cope with the impacts of climate change that already affect their countries. As part of the initiative, a partnership between the UN Development Program (UNDP) and the UN Environment Program (UNEP) will provide rapid response services for governments seeking to account for climate change in their infrastructure projects - 'climate proofing' - and other development plans. Several prospective European donors have already pledged funding to the scheme. Spain pledged USD 2 million, with half going to Africa and the other half to Latin America.

Source - SciDev

Energy

19. Brazil Opens First Ethanol-Biodiesel Plant

NOV. 22, 2006 - President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva showcased Brazil's prowess in the alternative fuels industry on Nov. 21 when he inaugurated Barralcool, the first integrated biofuels plant that will produce cane-based ethanol and biodiesel from oilseeds. Brazil, with its huge agricultural potential, has for decades had the world's most advanced biofuels market. After the oil crisis in the early 1970s, it launched the ProAlcool ethanol program to lighten dependence on crude imports. The ethanol-biodiesel plant in

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Barra do Bugres, Mato Grosso, in the heart of Brazil's center-west soybean belt, has produced ethanol from surrounding cane fields for over 20 years but Dedini, a leading provider of sugar-ethanol, biodiesel and cogeneration plants in Brazil, recently constructed the integrated biodiesel plant on the site after investments of 27 million reais (USD 13 million).

Source - Stuff.co.nz

120. Brazil Prepares for Biodiesel, but Plans for Family Production Begin to Fail

NOV. 21, 2006 - Brazilian economic groups connected to the soybean agro-industry are investing heavily in biodiesel plants to prepare for the Government's 2007 deadline for the implementation of a 2 percent mix of the new green fuel to Brazil's diesel supply (the mix will be upped to 5 percent in 2010). According to press reports, the new plants will process soybeans. Brazil plans to spur family agriculture by incorporating them into the biodiesel cycle by producing it from other crops have been facing severe difficulties with technology transfer, transportation, legal disputes, among others.

Source - Public Affairs US Embassy Brasilia

121. Argentina: Designing Eco-Friendly Heaters

NOV. 20, 2006 - Argentine researchers will present a project in innovations of gas heater design in order to double their efficiency and reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases. "The heaters on the market transmit only 40 to 60 percent of the calories in the fuel," Luis Juanico, coordinator of the project in which the National Council of Scientific Research and the National Commission of Atomic Energy are also participating, told Tierramerica. The innovations, which will be presented to executives in the business sector, consists of "introducing small fans between the cabinet and the chamber of gas, painting the chamber black, and using a cabinet that is more open and lets the heat pass," he said. This allows 85 percent transference of heat but makes the heaters just 3.8 percent more expensive.

Source - Tierramerica

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122. Venezuela, Brazil Meet on Energy

NOV. 15, 2006 - Venezuelan state energy officials said it would cost some USD 9 billion to develop the oil-rich Orinoco River deposits in a joint operation with Brazil's state-owned Petrobras. The heavy-crude reserves at Orinoco -- the country's most lucrative oil field -- could yield up to 7.6 billion barrels, according to Venezuelan's state-run PVDSA. The announcement came during a visit Nov. 14 to Venezuela by Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva who arrived just weeks ahead of the presidential election in which Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez is leading by double digits. Chavez has diverted a large portion of the country's oil revenue to social programs, including education and health. Last year, the two countries -- both oil independent -- broke ground on a USD 2.5 billion refinery in the northeastern Brazilian state of Pernambuco.

Source - UPI

123. Brazil Environment Minister Opposes Building of Nuclear Plant

Nov. 13, 2006 - Brazilian Environment Minister Marina Silva said she opposes the construction of a third nuclear power plant in the country, putting into question a state-run company's plan to build one as early as next year. "Brazil has enough renewable energy to hold off on the usage of nuclear energy," Silva said in an interview in Brasilia. "The ministry opposes the construction as it's still not sure how safe this energy could be." Eletronuclear, a Rio de Janeiro-based state company, has drafted plans to build a 7.6 billion reais (USD 3.5 billion) reactor, to be called Angra 3. The construction of the plant is part of the company's 10-year plan to meet rising energy demand in Latin America's biggest economy. Brazil's energy demand may grow by more than half by 2015.

Source - Bloomberg

124. Infinity Bio-Energy to Invest USD 75 Million in Brazil Biodiesel

OCT. 31, 2006 - Infinity Bio-Energy Ltd., a fund that bought three

sugar and ethanol mills in Brazil, plans to buy and build biodiesel plants in the country as demand for alternative fuels rises. Bermuda-based Infinity plans to invest about USD 75 million to buy a biodiesel project and build two more over the next two years, Chief

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Executive Officer Sergio Thompson-Flores said. Infinity will produce as much as 400 million liters (105.5 million gallons) of diesel from vegetable oils annually by 2008.

Source - Bloomberg

General

125. In Colombia, Minister Suspends Port Project

NOV. 2006 - Worried by reports of environmental damage and abuses of Indian rights, Colombia has suspended a USD 13 million port project in the Caribbean department of Guajira until the company involved can address the objections of conservationists and indigenous leaders. Brisa, a private Colombian company, began building the Brisa Multipurpose Port in September at the foot of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, the world's highest coastal range. It said the port would spur regional development, handle exports of more than three million tons annually of limestone, coal and other raw materials and generate 3,500 direct and 15,000 indirect jobs. But environmentalists argue work on the port would harm local, small-scale fishing as well as two wetlands that harbor important species of fish, migratory birds and reptiles. Among the animals that would be affected, they say, are the critically endangered American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*) and hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). The government's current lead environmental official, Juan Lozano, says he suspended construction of the port in part because Brisa had failed to consult with Indian communities as required by law. He also cites evidence construction was impeding water flows between two important wetlands, one a mangrove swamp. His action does not, however, amount to a cancellation of the project.

Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

126. Brazilian NGOs Call Government Agencies for TFCA Talk

NOV. 21, 2006 - A group of Brazilian NGOs invited the Ministry of the Environment and the Brazilian Treasury for a discussion about including Brazil in the debt conversion/reduction process under the

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TFCA (Tropical Forest Conservation Act). To date, no formal agreement has been made with the USG under the TFCA. This meeting was intended to spur the process.

Source - BRASILIA 00002449

127. Bolivia: Protection for Isolated Peoples

NOV. 20, 2006 - At a conference Nov. 20-22 in the Bolivian city of Santa Cruz, experts, indigenous communities and government officials will propose public policies to protect isolated populations in South America's tropical jungles. These communities, also known as "uncontacted", are descendants of those who resisted the inhumane exploitation of the rubber baron era in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and hid deep in the forests. They are also survivors of the oil drilling that is going on today, as well as the extension of roads, the logging industry and the expansion of the agricultural frontier. Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru are the countries with the most isolated indigenous communities.

Source - Tierramerica

128. Brazil: Measuring the Impact of Lightning

NOV. 06, 2006 - Every year, there are 61 million lightning strikes in Brazil, killing an average of 100 people and causing economic losses, according to a study by the atmospheric electricity group at the National Institute of Space Research. "It is the first precise estimate of the average number of lightning strikes from 1998 to 2005, based on satellite data and a national monitoring network," Kleber Naccarato, a researcher on the team, told Tierramerica. The lightning study is the latest worldwide. In the southern hemisphere summer these electric charges multiply, and provoke clashes of cold, humid winds with warm, dry winds. However, says Naccarato, "we lack data to blame the increase in lightning activity on global warming."

Source - Tierramerica

SOBEL